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Agatha Christie, *The Seven Dials Mystery* (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

Part 1

Jimmy Thesiger came running down the wide stairs at Chimneys. He took the steps two at a time, moving fast and light like a schoolboy who was late for class. The house was large and grand, with high walls and long carpets that made no sound under his feet. As he turned the last corner, he almost crashed into Tredwell, the tall and serious butler, who was walking across the hall with a tray of fresh hot coffee. Tredwell moved with great skill and did not spill a single drop.

“Sorry,” said Jimmy quickly. “I say, Tredwell, am I the last down?”

“No, sir,” said Tredwell in his calm voice. “Mr. Wade has not yet come down.”

“Good,” said Jimmy with relief, and he went into the breakfast room.

The room was quiet. Sunlight came in through the tall windows and fell across the white tablecloth. Only Lady Coote was there. She was sitting very straight in her chair. When she looked at Jimmy, her eyes were large and sad. Jimmy always felt uncomfortable under that look. He felt as if he had done something wrong, even if he did not know what.

“I’m afraid I’m a bit late, Lady Coote,” he said.

“Oh, it doesn’t matter,” she answered in a deep and unhappy voice.

But it did matter to her. She believed strongly in rising early. For many years, her husband, Sir Oswald Coote, had demanded breakfast at exactly eight o’clock. If it was even one minute late, he became angry. Lady Coote had learned to see time as something serious and strict. To her, coming down at eleven fifteen was

almost a crime.

Jimmy sat down and began to eat quickly. He was young, fair, and cheerful. He did not think deeply about life. He liked good food, good friends, and an easy day. Still, as he felt Lady Coote's eyes on him, he wondered why people could not simply enjoy themselves.

Lady Coote was a tall and handsome woman in a sad way. She had dark eyes that always seemed close to tears. If she stood in the snow wearing black, she would look like a woman in a tragic play. Yet her life had not truly been tragic. She had married young and had loved her husband. Together they had grown richer year by year. Now Sir Oswald was a powerful man who rented great houses like Chimneys. He was proud of his success and often said that he owed it to early rising and hard work.

Lady Coote sighed and rose from her chair. She walked out onto the terrace. The air was cool and bright. In the garden stood MacDonald, the head gardener. He was a strong man with a serious face. He ruled the gardens like a king.

"Good morning, MacDonald," said Lady Coote.

"Good morning, m'lady," he replied in a slow voice.

"I was wondering if we might have some of the late grapes for dinner tonight," she said gently.

"They're not ready yet," said MacDonald at once.

"Oh," said Lady Coote. She felt small. "I tasted one yesterday and it seemed very nice."

"If you had asked, m'lady, I would have sent a bunch to you," he answered. His tone made her feel she had broken an important rule.

"Yes. Of course. Another time," she said quickly.

She tried again. "And the lawn near the rose garden—could it be used for bowls? Sir Oswald enjoys bowls."

MacDonald paused. "It could be done," he said slowly. "But I would need to take William from the lower border."

"Oh," said Lady Coote, not knowing what that meant but understanding it was serious. "Well, we must not disturb William."

“That is what I thought, m’lady.”

“Yes. Quite right,” she said.

MacDonald walked away. Lady Coote watched him go. She felt alone in the large house and the even larger garden.

Jimmy soon came out to the terrace. He had eaten well and felt better.

“Lovely morning,” he said.

“Is it?” she asked quietly. “Oh yes, I suppose it is.”

He looked toward the lake. “Where is everyone? On the water?”

“I believe so.”

Just then she remembered something and hurried inside again. “Is Mr. Wade down yet?” she asked Tredwell anxiously.

“No, m’lady.”

“It’s very late.”

“Yes, m’lady.”

She looked at the clock. It was nearly noon. “I suppose he will come eventually?”

“Undoubtedly, m’lady,” said Tredwell. “Yesterday he came down at eleven thirty.”

Lady Coote felt a strange mix of worry and sympathy. It must be difficult for the servants to manage meals with such hours.

At that moment Rupert Bateman, Sir Oswald’s secretary, entered the hall. He was thin and serious, wearing glasses.

“Oh, there you are, Lady Coote. Sir Oswald is asking for you.”

She hurried away. Bateman stepped out onto the terrace where Jimmy stood.

“Morning, Pongo,” said Jimmy with a grin. That had been Bateman’s school nickname.

Bateman nodded and went inside the library. Jimmy laughed softly and walked toward the lake.

Three girls were there, sitting near the water. They were modern girls with short hair and bright eyes. Two had dark hair and one had fair. With them were Jimmy’s friends, Bill Eversleigh and Ronny Devereux.

“Hullo, Jimmy,” called one of the girls. “Is Gerry still asleep?”

“You don’t mean he’s not up yet?” said Bill.

“It’s almost lunch,” said Ronny.

“It worries Lady Coote,” said the girl called Socks. “It’s not kind.”

“We should pull him out of bed,” said Bill.

“Let’s be clever about it,” said Socks. She liked to use that word.

Jimmy laughed. “I’m not clever.”

“We must think of something to wake him early tomorrow,” said Ronny.

They began to talk at once, ideas flying in the cool air. Finally Bateman passed by, and they stopped him.

“What’s the best way to wake a man?” asked Jimmy.

“An alarm clock,” said Bateman simply. “I always use one.”

When he left, the group looked at each other.

“One alarm clock won’t be enough,” said Ronny.

“Then let’s buy several,” said Bill suddenly. “We’ll all go to Market Basing and get one each.”

The idea grew quickly. They would hide the clocks in Gerry Wade’s room. They would set them to ring one after another early in the morning. It would be a harmless joke.

Jimmy went to check that Gerry was still eating breakfast and would not follow them. Then they asked Lady Coote to keep him busy. She agreed, though she looked worried.

Soon two cars were driving toward Market Basing. The day was bright, and the young people felt light and excited. They laughed loudly as they entered the main shop in the town.

Mr. Murgatroyd, the shop owner, looked surprised when they asked for alarm clocks. Not one, but many.

“I recommend this one,” he began carefully. “Very reliable—”

“We don’t need reliable,” said one girl. “Just loud.”

Jimmy tested one. The bell rang sharply and strongly. Soon the shop was full of ringing sounds.

In the end they bought six clocks, and Ronny bought one more for Bateman so that he would be part of the joke.

As they drove back, they felt pleased with themselves. It was simple and funny. They did not know that this small plan, made in laughter and light hearts, would lead them toward something far darker than any of them could imagine.

Part 2

That evening dinner passed in its usual way. Sir Oswald spoke about business in a strong voice, as though he were giving a speech to a room full of important men instead of to a small group of young guests. Lady Coote listened with deep attention and nodded often. The young people tried not to yawn. Gerald Wade, who had finally come down shortly before lunch that day, looked cheerful and calm, as if nothing in the world could hurry him.

After dinner, Sir Oswald announced that he would like to play bridge. It was not truly a suggestion. When Sir Oswald expressed a wish, others followed it. Soon cards were dealt at one table. In another room the wireless was turned on for dancing, but the young people did not truly dance. They had other plans.

One by one they slipped upstairs. The corridor was long and dim, lit by low lamps on the walls. Gerald Wade's room was at the end. They gathered outside it, whispering and trying not to laugh.

"Now then," said Bill softly, holding two clocks under his arm. "Where shall we put them?"

"Under the bed," said Jimmy. "In a row."

"And what time shall we set them for?" asked Helen.

They argued in low voices. Some thought all the clocks should ring at once. Others wanted them to ring one after another, to keep Gerry awake again and again. In the end they decided on steady attack. The first clock would ring at six thirty. The others would follow every few minutes.

"This will teach him," said Bill with a grin.

Just then footsteps sounded on the stairs. Everyone froze.

“It’s all right,” whispered Jimmy after peering around the corner. “It’s only Pongo.”

Rupert Bateman approached, holding a handkerchief. He stopped when he saw the group.

“He will hear them ticking,” he said calmly. “If you place them now.”

The others stared at him. Of course. Eight clocks ticking loudly in one room would give away the joke.

“Brilliant,” said Jimmy quietly. “We wait until he’s asleep.”

They went downstairs again. In the drawing room Sir Oswald was explaining to Lady Coote how she had played a certain hand incorrectly. Lady Coote smiled sadly and thanked him for his advice. Gerald Wade stood near the fireplace, saying pleasant things and praising everyone’s play in a warm, simple way.

Jimmy watched him for a moment. Gerry looked healthy. His cheeks were pink. His eyes were bright. He laughed easily.

It was hard to imagine anything could disturb such a man.

At half past twelve good nights were said. One by one the house grew quiet. Ronny, whose room was next to Gerry’s, waited and listened. At last he saw the light under Gerry’s door go out.

It was nearly two in the morning when Ronny crept along the corridor, tapping softly at doors. Soon the others joined him, dressed in dressing gowns and slippers.

“He’s asleep,” whispered Ronny.

They gathered the clocks. Once again there was debate.

“Only one of us should go in,” said Bill. “Too much noise otherwise.”

The girls were quickly rejected. They might giggle. Bill himself was too heavy on his feet. At last all agreed that Bateman was the best choice.

“You walk like a cat,” said Jimmy.

Bateman accepted without comment. He opened the door slowly and disappeared into the dark room, carrying two clocks. The others held their breath. After a minute he returned for more. This continued until all eight clocks were placed.

From inside the room came the strong sound of ticking. Eight separate ticks

joined into one loud rhythm.

Gerry did not move.

The door was closed gently. The young people returned to their beds, smiling and satisfied.

At six thirty sharp the first clock rang. Its sharp bell cut through the house. Ronny sat up in bed, confused and alarmed. Another bell followed, then another.

He jumped out of bed and ran to Gerry's door. He pressed his ear to it.

The bells rang loudly, one after another. The ticking between them sounded strong and proud.

But there was no shout. No angry voice. No movement.

Ronny waited, frowning. Surely Gerry would swear, throw something, open the door.

Nothing happened.

After a long minute, another bell rang.

Still no sound from inside except ticking.

Ronny's smile faded.

Later, around noon, the group met again in the dining room. It was past twelve. Gerald Wade had not come down.

"He's doing this on purpose," said Socks. "He's pretending."

"It's not funny now," said Jimmy quietly.

At that moment Tredwell entered the room. He looked serious.

"I thought Mr. Bateman was here," he said.

Ronny and Jimmy followed him into the hall.

"Mr. Wade has not yet come down," said Tredwell. "I sent Williams to check. He returned greatly distressed."

Tredwell paused.

"I fear the young gentleman has died in his sleep."

The words fell heavily in the quiet hall.

"That's nonsense," said Ronny quickly. "There must be a mistake."

"I have locked the door," said Tredwell calmly. "I have sent for the doctor."

Jimmy felt a strange cold feeling inside him. Only hours ago they had been

laughing outside that same door.

They waited in the library. The doctor arrived—a thin, quick man with sharp eyes.

After examining the body, he came downstairs to speak with them.

“I should say an overdose of chloral,” he said. “There was a bottle by the bed.”

“Chloral?” said Ronny. “But Gerry slept perfectly.”

“Did he complain of trouble?” asked the doctor.

“Never.”

“There will be an inquest,” said the doctor. “We must inform his family.”

Gerry had a half-sister, Loraine. She lived at Deane Priory, about twenty miles away.

Ronny insisted on going to tell her. Jimmy drove him.

The road was long and quiet. Neither spoke for some time.

At last Ronny said, “There’s something I ought to tell you.”

Jimmy glanced at him. “About Gerry?”

“Yes.”

Ronny hesitated. “No. I can’t.”

Jimmy did not press him.

When they reached Deane Priory, a maid told them Miss Wade was in the garden.

They found her there with two dogs. She was small and fair, dressed simply. Her face was open and kind. When she saw them, she smiled.

“Why didn’t you bring Gerry?” she asked.

The smile faded when she saw their faces.

“Gerry?” she whispered.

Ronny told her gently.

She gasped but did not cry. She asked questions calmly. How? When?

“A sleeping draught?” she repeated in disbelief.

Jimmy felt uneasy at that tone.

She refused their offer to drive her back at once. “I must be alone for a little while,” she said quietly.

On the way back to Chimneys, the air between Jimmy and Ronny felt different. Something unspoken hung there.

When they returned, Jimmy was stopped by Lady Coote, who spoke at length about other sad deaths she had known.

Later, Jimmy went upstairs. Ronny was coming out of Gerry's room.

"I've seen him," Ronny said.

Jimmy forced himself to enter.

The room was tidy now. White flowers lay on the bed. Gerry's face looked pale and peaceful.

Jimmy turned to leave—and stopped.

On the mantelpiece stood the alarm clocks. They were lined up neatly in a row. He counted them.

Seven.

There had been eight.

He went out and found Ronny.

"There are only seven," he said. "One is missing."

Ronny made a small sound, almost a sigh.

"Seven instead of eight," said Jimmy slowly. "I wonder why."

Part 3

The days after the death passed in a strange and heavy way. Chimneys, which had been full of laughter and easy talk, now felt quiet and watchful. Even the large rooms seemed smaller, as though they were holding their breath. The inquest came and went. People spoke in low voices. Servants moved softly along the corridors. The young guests left one by one, each carrying away a different thought about what had happened.

The verdict was simple: death by accident. Gerald Wade had taken too much chloral. No one had seen anything strange. No one had heard anything unusual. The clocks were mentioned, and there was confusion about who had arranged them on the mantelpiece. But in the end, it was treated as a foolish joke with an

unhappy ending.

Lord Caterham was deeply unhappy about the whole matter. He had returned to Chimneys the day after the guests left, and he spoke often about how unlucky it was that such things always seemed to happen in his house.

“I do not like deaths,” he said more than once. “Especially when they bring inquests. They upset the peace of everything.”

His daughter, Lady Eileen Brent—called Bundle by everyone—did not share his desire for peace. She was tall and slim, with bright eyes and quick movements. She liked action. She liked questions. And she did not like things that did not make sense.

That evening, sitting alone in her bedroom, she thought again about the story of the clocks. The maid had told her that one clock had been found outside on the lawn, below the window. It had been thrown out. The other seven had been placed neatly on the mantelpiece.

That did not seem natural.

Bundle stood up and walked slowly around the room. It was her room. Gerry Wade had died there. She felt no fear, only a strong interest. Something about the whole matter troubled her.

On her writing desk lay a letter. It was unfinished. She had found it earlier that day in the drawer of the desk, which sometimes stuck. The date at the top had caught her eye: September twenty-first. The night before Gerry died.

She read the letter again.

“My darling Loraine— I will be down on Wednesday. Am feeling awfully fit and rather pleased with myself all round. It will be heavenly to see you. Look here, do forget what I said about that Seven Dials business. I thought it was going to be more or less of a joke, but it isn’t—anything but. I’m sorry I ever said anything about it—it’s not the kind of business kids like you ought to be mixed up in. So forget about it, see?

Something else I wanted to tell you—but I’m so sleepy I can’t keep my eyes open.

Oh, about Lurcher; I think—”

And there the letter ended.

Bundle tapped the paper with her finger.

“Feeling fit,” she murmured. “So sleepy he can’t keep his eyes open.”

The two ideas did not sit well together. If he felt well and happy, why had he taken a heavy sleeping draught? And what was this “Seven Dials business”? The name stirred a memory, but she could not yet place it clearly.

She decided to send the letter to Loraine Wade. It belonged to her. But she kept a copy in her mind.

The next morning was bright and clear. Bundle felt restless. She told her father she was driving to London in the Hispano.

“In a hurry?” asked Lord Caterham suspiciously.

“Very much so,” she replied.

He shook his head and refused to join her.

Bundle enjoyed driving fast. The wind touched her face and made her feel alive. The sky was blue. The road stretched out ahead of her.

She was thinking of the letter, and of the missing clock, when it happened.

Without warning, a man stepped out from the hedge directly into the road in front of her car. He moved strangely, as if he were weak or drunk.

Bundle turned the wheel sharply. The car swerved hard. She heard a sound—a dull sound. She stopped the car at once and jumped out.

The man lay face down on the road.

Her heart pounded. She ran to him and turned him over gently. He was young. His face was pale. His eyes half opened, and she saw pain in them.

He tried to speak.

Bundle bent close.

“Yes?” she said.

His lips moved. The words came slowly.

“Seven Dials... tell...”

“Tell who?” she asked urgently.

He struggled again.

“Tell... Jimmy Thesiger...”

Then his head fell back. His body went limp.

Bundle sat back, shaking. She believed she had killed him.

With great effort she lifted him into the car and drove to the nearest town. She found a doctor and told him what had happened.

The doctor went out to examine the man. When he returned, his face was serious but not angry.

“You did not run over him,” he said. “The car never touched him.”

Bundle stared.

“He was shot,” said the doctor quietly.

For a moment she could not speak. Then her mind began to move quickly.

“Shot? But how? There was no one there.”

“The shot was fired earlier,” said the doctor. “He was already wounded when he came into the road.”

Bundle felt the world shift again.

“He said something,” she whispered. “Before he died.”

“What did he say?”

“Seven Dials. And he told me to tell Jimmy Thesiger.”

The doctor looked at her sharply.

“Seven Dials?” he repeated.

Bundle nodded slowly.

The name now struck her clearly. It was the same name from Gerry Wade’s unfinished letter.

Seven Dials.

It was not only a place in London.

It was something else.

Something darker.

Part 4

Dr. Cassell stood very still for a moment after Bundle spoke. His eyes were thoughtful.

“Seven Dials,” he said again slowly. “You are certain that is what he said?”

“Quite certain,” said Bundle. “He said ‘Seven Dials... tell... Jimmy Thesiger.’ He seemed to want very much to finish the sentence, but he had no strength.”

The doctor nodded.

“And you know this Mr. Jimmy Thesiger?”

“Yes. He was staying at Chimneys when a young man died there last week. Gerald Wade.”

The doctor raised his eyebrows slightly.

“Another death?”

“Yes. It was called an accident. An overdose of chloral. But now—” She stopped.

“Now you are not so sure?” the doctor suggested.

Bundle did not answer at once. She was thinking very hard.

“I don’t know what I am sure of,” she said at last. “But it seems odd. Gerry wrote something about Seven Dials the night he died. And now this man says the same thing before he is shot.”

“You had better tell the police everything at once,” said Dr. Cassell.

Bundle felt a small jump inside her. The police meant questions. And she did not yet know enough to answer them properly.

“Of course,” she said calmly. “You have already sent for them?”

“Yes. They will be here shortly.”

Bundle stood up and walked to the window. Outside she could see her car and the still figure lying in it. A short time ago she had thought she was a killer. Now she knew she was not—but that did not make things easier. It made them more serious.

The police arrived within half an hour. A local inspector came first, and behind him a constable. They examined the body and spoke in low voices with the doctor. Then the inspector came inside.

He was a middle-aged man with a slow manner and sharp eyes. He looked at Bundle with interest.

“You are Lady Eileen Brent?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“And you say the man stepped into the road in front of you?”

“Yes. I swerved to avoid him.”

“You did not see anyone else nearby?”

“No.”

“You are quite sure?”

“Quite.”

He nodded. “And before he died he said something to you?”

“Yes. He said ‘Seven Dials... tell... Jimmy Thesiger.’”

The inspector wrote this down carefully.

“Do you know what he meant?”

“No. But I know Jimmy Thesiger.”

“And who is he?”

“A friend. He was staying at Chimneys when Mr. Gerald Wade died.”

The inspector stopped writing.

“Ah,” he said slowly. “Yes. I have heard of that case.”

Bundle watched him closely.

“There may be no connection,” she said lightly. “But the same words appear in a letter that Mr. Wade wrote the night he died.”

The inspector looked up sharply.

“A letter?”

“Yes. It mentioned Seven Dials.”

“You have this letter?”

“I sent it this morning to Mr. Wade’s sister. It was unfinished.”

The inspector closed his notebook.

“I think, Lady Eileen, that we shall have to look into this matter more deeply.”

Bundle smiled slightly.

“I think so too.”

Later that afternoon she drove back to Chimneys more slowly than usual. The bright sky no longer felt cheerful. Her mind was full of thoughts.

When she arrived, she went straight to find her father.

Lord Caterham was in the library, reading a newspaper with great care. He looked up as she entered.

“Back already? I trust you did not run over anyone.”

“As a matter of fact,” said Bundle calmly, “I nearly did.”

He dropped the paper.

“Bundle!”

She told him everything. When she finished, he leaned back in his chair and stared at her.

“Shot?” he repeated. “Shot in the road? My dear child, this is most disturbing.”

“It is more than disturbing,” said Bundle. “It connects with Gerry Wade.”

Lord Caterham made a small unhappy sound.

“I knew it,” he said. “I knew there was something unpleasant about that business.”

“Father,” said Bundle quietly, “do you remember anything about Seven Dials?”

He frowned.

“Seven Dials? It is a place in London. Rather poor. Narrow streets.”

“Anything else?”

He thought again.

“No. Should there be?”

“I don’t know,” said Bundle.

That evening she sent a note to Jimmy Thesiger, asking him to come down at once. She did not explain why. She preferred to speak face to face.

Jimmy arrived the next day. He looked surprised to see the serious expression on her face.

“Hallo, Bundle,” he said. “You look as if you have found a body in the garden.”

“Almost,” she replied.

She told him the story of the man in the road.

Jimmy listened without interrupting. When she repeated the dying words, his face changed.

“Seven Dials?” he said slowly.

“Yes.”

He sat down heavily.

“Gerry wrote those words too,” he murmured.

“You know about the letter?” she asked quickly.

“Lorraine showed it to me this morning. She received it yesterday. She was puzzled. So was I.”

Bundle nodded.

“The doctor says the man was shot before he stepped into the road. He must have been trying to reach someone. Trying to send a message.”

“To me,” said Jimmy quietly.

They were silent for a moment.

“Jimmy,” said Bundle at last, “what do you know about Seven Dials?”

He hesitated.

“Not much. Only that Gerry mentioned it once. He laughed about it. Said it was a bit of fun. But then he stopped laughing.”

“Stopped?”

“Yes. He told me not to bother about it. Said it was nothing.”

Bundle leaned forward.

“And you believed him?”

Jimmy met her eyes.

“I did not,” he said slowly. “But I let it drop.”

Outside the window the autumn wind moved through the trees. The world looked calm. But inside the room something had shifted.

Two deaths.

One unfinished letter.

One dying message.

And the name that linked them all.

Seven Dials.

Part 5

Jimmy remained seated for a long moment after Bundle finished speaking. His

face, usually open and cheerful, now looked thoughtful and serious.

“Tell me exactly what he looked like,” he said at last. “The man in the road.”

“Young,” said Bundle. “Well dressed. Small moustache. He did not look like a criminal. He looked like an ordinary young man.”

Jimmy nodded slowly.

“Did you recognize him?”

“No. I had never seen him before.”

Jimmy stood up and began to walk across the room. He did not hurry. He moved as though he were putting his thoughts into order.

“Gerry was not the kind of man to get mixed up in dangerous things,” he said. “He liked easy fun. He liked comfort.”

“Yet he wrote that Seven Dials was not a joke,” said Bundle quietly.

Jimmy stopped walking.

“Yes,” he said. “That is what troubles me.”

Bundle watched him carefully.

“You are not telling me everything,” she said.

Jimmy gave a small smile.

“I am telling you everything I know. But perhaps not everything I suspect.”

“Then tell me what you suspect.”

He hesitated. Then he spoke slowly.

“When we were at Chimneys, the morning Gerry died, something felt wrong. I cannot explain it clearly. It was not only the clocks. It was the feeling that something had already happened before we even knew.”

“You mean before the clocks rang?”

“Yes.”

Bundle nodded.

“The doctor said Gerry must have died earlier in the night,” she said. “Before six.”

“Exactly,” said Jimmy.

They looked at each other.

“The first alarm clock rang at six thirty,” he continued. “If Gerry was already

dead by then, he never heard them.”

“Then who threw the eighth clock out of the window?” asked Bundle.

Jimmy did not answer at once.

“Someone who was in that room,” he said at last.

“After Gerry died?”

“Yes.”

Bundle felt a quick chill.

“But the door was locked,” she said.

“Locked in the morning,” said Jimmy. “Not necessarily during the night.”

There was silence again.

“Jimmy,” said Bundle, “did Gerry have enemies?”

Jimmy laughed softly.

“Gerry? He could not keep his socks in pairs. He certainly could not keep enemies.”

“Money troubles?”

“No. He was comfortable.”

“A woman?”

Jimmy shook his head.

“He liked women. But not in a serious way.”

Bundle thought of Loraine Wade. The quiet strength in her face.

“What about his sister?” she asked.

Jimmy looked surprised.

“Lorraine? What about her?”

“Did she know anything about Seven Dials?”

Jimmy’s eyes grew thoughtful.

“Perhaps,” he said slowly. “The letter told her to forget it.”

“Yes.”

“Which means she had already heard something.”

Bundle stood up suddenly.

“We must speak to her again.”

Jimmy nodded.

“Yes. And we must find out what Seven Dials truly is.”

“It is a place in London,” said Bundle.

“That may be,” said Jimmy. “But I think it is more than that.”

At that moment there was a knock at the door. A servant entered.

“Inspector Raglan to see you, my lady.”

Bundle’s eyes brightened slightly.

“Show him in.”

Inspector Raglan entered with a firm step. He was a large man with a serious face. His eyes moved quickly around the room, taking in both Jimmy and Bundle.

“Lady Eileen,” he said. “Mr. Thesiger.”

“Inspector,” said Bundle pleasantly.

Raglan did not waste time.

“The man who was shot has been identified,” he said. “His name was Henry Wade.”

Jimmy started.

“Wade?” he repeated.

“Yes. A cousin of Gerald Wade.”

Silence fell heavily in the room.

“That cannot be a coincidence,” said Bundle quietly.

“No,” said Raglan. “It cannot.”

He looked at Jimmy closely.

“You knew him?”

Jimmy shook his head.

“Not well. I had met him once or twice.”

“He worked in London,” said Raglan. “Near Seven Dials.”

The name hung in the air.

“Inspector,” said Bundle, “what do you know about Seven Dials?”

Raglan’s face did not change.

“It is an area in London. Narrow streets. Shops. Nothing unusual.”

“Nothing else?” asked Jimmy.

Raglan paused.

“There have been rumors,” he admitted. “Of a small private club. Secret meetings. Nothing proven.”

“A club?” said Bundle softly.

“Yes. Called the Seven Dials Club.”

Jimmy felt a slow tightening inside him.

“And what does this club do?” he asked.

“That,” said Raglan, “is what I intend to discover.”

Bundle and Jimmy exchanged a look.

Two Wades were dead.

Both connected to Seven Dials.

And somewhere in London, perhaps in a narrow street where seven roads met, there was a club.

A club that might hold the answer.

The quiet days at Chimneys were over.

Something had begun.

Part 6

After Inspector Raglan left, the room felt smaller. The air seemed heavy with thoughts that no one spoke aloud. Jimmy stood by the window, looking out across the lawn, but he did not see the trees or the sky. He was seeing something else in his mind.

“A cousin,” he said at last. “Henry Wade. I remember him now. Quiet fellow. Not like Gerry.”

“More serious?” asked Bundle.

“Yes. Not foolish. Not easy.”

Bundle moved closer to him.

“Then perhaps he knew something Gerry did not fully understand.”

Jimmy turned toward her.

“Or perhaps Gerry understood more than we thought.”

That idea stayed between them.

“Inspector Raglan will go to London,” said Bundle. “He will look into this Seven Dials Club.”

Jimmy smiled faintly.

“Raglan will ask questions. People will close their mouths.”

“Then we must ask different questions,” said Bundle calmly.

Jimmy studied her face.

“You mean to get involved.”

“Of course,” she said. “Two young men are dead. One spoke your name before he died. I am not going to sit quietly in the country.”

Jimmy laughed softly.

“I never expected you would.”

Later that afternoon they drove to Deane Priory. Loraine Wade opened the door herself. She looked pale, but there was strength in her eyes.

“You have news,” she said at once.

Bundle told her gently about Henry Wade.

Loraine’s hand went to her mouth.

“Henry too?” she whispered.

“You knew him well?” asked Jimmy.

“Yes. He was different from Gerry. He worried about things.”

“Did he ever speak of Seven Dials?” Bundle asked quietly.

Loraine hesitated.

“Once,” she said slowly. “He said Gerry was mixed up in something foolish. He said it was dangerous to treat it like a game.”

Jimmy felt a cold line move down his back.

“Did he explain?”

“No. He said it was not my concern.”

“Gerry wrote to you about Seven Dials the night he died,” said Bundle.

Loraine nodded.

“He told me to forget it. That it was not for someone like me.”

“And did you forget it?” asked Jimmy gently.

Loraine shook her head.

“No. I could not.”

There was silence.

“Do you know where this club meets?” Bundle asked.

Lorraine looked at her, surprised.

“Club?”

“Inspector Raglan believes there is a Seven Dials Club in London.”

Lorraine’s eyes widened slightly.

“Gerry once said he had been invited somewhere,” she said slowly. “He laughed about it. Said it sounded mysterious.”

“Did he go?” asked Jimmy.

“Yes. At least once.”

“And when was that?”

“A few days before he died.”

Jimmy and Bundle exchanged another look.

“We must go to London,” said Bundle firmly.

“Yes,” said Jimmy.

Lorraine stepped forward.

“Be careful,” she said quietly. “I feel... I feel that something dark is behind this.”

Jimmy smiled gently.

“We shall not walk in blindly.”

But even as he said the words, he knew that they were already walking into something they did not understand.

That evening, back at Chimneys, Bundle sat alone again in her room. She looked at the mantelpiece where the clocks had once stood.

Seven clocks in a row.

One thrown out of the window.

Seven Dials.

Seven clocks.

The number seemed to repeat itself like a quiet beat.

Tick.

Tick.

Tick.

Somewhere in London, in a place where streets met in strange lines, there was a club.

A club that had touched the lives of Gerry Wade and Henry Wade.

And perhaps had ended them.

Bundle did not feel fear.

She felt curiosity.

And determination.

Tomorrow, they would go to London.

Tomorrow, Seven Dials would no longer be only a name.

It would be a place.

And perhaps a danger.

But Bundle Brent had never feared danger.

She only feared boredom.

And boredom was gone.

Part 7

The next morning came grey and cool. A thin mist lay over the fields around Chimneys. Bundle was ready early, dressed in a simple coat and hat. She stood in the hall, tapping her gloves lightly against her hand.

Jimmy came down the stairs two at a time.

“You are actually early,” he said with a faint smile.

“I am never late when there is something interesting to do,” said Bundle.

Lord Caterham appeared from the library door.

“You are both going to London?” he asked sadly.

“Yes, Father.”

“I wish you would not,” he said. “Whenever you use that tone of voice, Bundle, something unpleasant happens.”

“Nothing unpleasant will happen,” she said cheerfully. “At least nothing too

unpleasant.”

He groaned softly.

“If there are secret clubs and murders in London,” he said, “I fail to see why we must take part in them.”

“Because,” said Bundle simply, “they have already taken part in us.”

Lord Caterham did not answer. He shook his head and went back into the library.

Soon the car was on the road. Jimmy drove this time. Bundle sat beside him, looking ahead with bright eyes.

“What is your plan?” he asked.

“We find Seven Dials,” she said.

“That will not be difficult. It is only a part of London.”

“Yes. But we are not looking for the place,” said Bundle. “We are looking for the club.”

Jimmy nodded.

“Inspector Raglan will already be asking questions.”

“Which means doors will be closing,” said Bundle calmly.

They reached London before noon. The city was busy and loud. Cars moved in long lines. People crossed streets quickly. The air felt heavier than in the country.

Jimmy drove toward the area known as Seven Dials. The streets grew narrower. The buildings stood close together. Shops filled the ground floors, with small windows and old signs.

“Here we are,” said Jimmy quietly.

Bundle looked around. Seven streets met at a single point. It was not grand. It was not dark either. It was ordinary.

“A good place to hide something,” she said softly.

They parked the car and began to walk.

“If there is a club,” said Jimmy, “it will not have a sign outside.”

“No,” said Bundle. “But someone must know of it.”

They entered a small café. It was narrow and smelled of coffee. A few men sat at tables reading newspapers.

Jimmy ordered tea. Bundle looked around carefully.

After a few minutes she leaned toward Jimmy.

“That man in the corner,” she whispered. “He is watching us.”

Jimmy did not turn his head.

“Describe him,” he said quietly.

“Dark hair. Thin face. Grey coat.”

Jimmy lifted his cup and looked casually across the room.

“Yes,” he said. “He has been here since we came in.”

Bundle smiled faintly.

“Good,” she said.

“Good?”

“If we are being watched, we are close to something.”

Jimmy laughed softly.

“You enjoy this.”

“Yes.”

They finished their tea and left the café. The man in the grey coat followed them at a distance.

They walked slowly through the narrow streets. After a few turns, Bundle stopped suddenly.

“We are going in circles,” she said.

Jimmy nodded.

“He wants to see where we go.”

“Let him,” said Bundle calmly.

They turned into a small side street. Halfway down, Bundle stopped and faced Jimmy.

“Now,” she said.

They stepped quickly into a small shop doorway and waited.

Moments later the man in the grey coat passed by. He looked confused for a second, then hurried on.

Jimmy stepped out behind him.

“Excuse me,” he said politely.

The man turned sharply. His eyes were cold.

“Yes?”

“You seem interested in us,” said Jimmy calmly.

“I do not know what you mean.”

“You have followed us from the café.”

The man’s face did not change.

“I walk where I please.”

Bundle stepped forward.

“So do we,” she said brightly. “But perhaps you would like to tell us why you are following us.”

The man looked at her carefully. For a moment something like surprise crossed his face.

“You are making a mistake,” he said at last.

Jimmy moved a little closer.

“Perhaps. But we are looking for something called the Seven Dials Club. Do you know it?”

For the first time the man’s eyes shifted slightly.

“No,” he said.

“You are a poor liar,” said Bundle pleasantly.

The man’s face hardened.

“Go back to the country,” he said quietly. “You are not wanted here.”

Jimmy felt a small spark of anger.

“Two men are dead,” he said. “We are not going anywhere.”

The man looked from Jimmy to Bundle.

“You have been warned,” he said.

Then he turned and walked quickly away.

Bundle watched him go.

“Well,” she said lightly, “that confirms it.”

“Confirms what?”

“That Seven Dials is more than a street.”

Jimmy looked down the narrow road where the man had disappeared.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “And that someone does not wish us to find it.”

The mist that had lain over the country that morning seemed now to have followed them into the city.

The game had begun.

And they were already inside it.

Part 8

They stood for a moment in the narrow street after the man in the grey coat had gone. The noise of London moved around them—cars, voices, footsteps—but the small space between the tall buildings felt strangely still.

“He was not just curious,” said Jimmy quietly.

“No,” said Bundle. “He was afraid.”

“Afraid of us?”

“Afraid of what we might learn.”

Jimmy gave her a quick look.

“That means we are on the right path.”

They began to walk again, this time more slowly. Bundle studied the buildings carefully. Most were small shops. Some had rooms above them. A few doors looked old and unused.

“If there is a club,” she said, “it might meet upstairs. Somewhere private.”

Jimmy nodded.

“And not in the open.”

They stopped outside a small bookshop. It looked quiet and almost empty. The sign above the door was old. The window showed a few dusty books.

“Why here?” Jimmy asked.

“Because it looks dull,” said Bundle. “And dull places are often useful.”

They entered.

A thin man with white hair stood behind the counter. He looked up without smiling.

“Yes?”

“We are looking for a private club,” said Bundle lightly. “We were told it meets

somewhere near here.”

The man’s eyes did not change.

“There are no clubs here,” he said.

“Not even a Seven Dials Club?” asked Jimmy calmly.

For a second, the man’s fingers tightened on the edge of the counter.

“You are mistaken,” he said.

Bundle smiled.

“I hope so,” she replied pleasantly. “We would not wish to disturb anyone.”

They left the shop.

“He knew,” said Jimmy.

“Yes,” said Bundle. “But he will not speak.”

They walked on. At the center where the seven streets met stood a tall column. Around it, traffic moved slowly.

Bundle stopped and turned in a slow circle.

“Seven streets,” she said softly. “Seven dials of a clock.”

Jimmy looked at her sharply.

“Seven clocks,” he said.

“Yes.”

The number came back again.

Seven clocks on the mantelpiece.

Seven streets meeting in one place.

One missing clock.

One dead man in the road.

“There is a pattern,” Bundle murmured.

“But we do not yet see it clearly,” said Jimmy.

Just then a small boy came running past them. He slowed, looked at Jimmy, then handed him a folded piece of paper.

“For you,” the boy said quickly, and ran off before Jimmy could speak.

Jimmy unfolded the paper.

There were only a few words written in pencil.

“Tonight. Eleven o’clock. Old warehouse, Little Compton Street. Come alone.”

Jimmy read it twice.

Bundle watched his face.

“Well?” she asked.

He handed her the note.

“They wish to meet you,” she said quietly.

“Yes.”

“And you will go.”

It was not a question.

“Yes,” said Jimmy.

Bundle folded the paper carefully.

“You will not go alone.”

“It says come alone.”

“Yes,” she said calmly. “Which means you must not.”

Jimmy smiled faintly.

“You enjoy breaking rules.”

“Only foolish rules.”

They returned to the car and drove to Jimmy’s flat. It was small but tidy. There they spoke quietly about the meeting.

“It may be a trap,” said Jimmy.

“It probably is,” said Bundle.

“Then you must stay away.”

“Certainly not.”

Jimmy shook his head.

“You cannot come inside.”

“No,” she agreed. “But I can be near.”

He looked at her.

“You are very certain.”

“Yes.”

That evening they waited. The hours moved slowly. At ten thirty they left the flat and drove back toward Seven Dials.

The streets were darker now. Lamps cast long shadows. Fewer people walked

about.

Little Compton Street was narrow and quiet. At the end stood an old warehouse. Its windows were high and dark. The door looked unused.

Jimmy stopped the car a short distance away.

“Stay here,” he said softly.

“Of course,” said Bundle.

But her eyes were bright.

Jimmy walked toward the warehouse alone.

The door opened before he touched it.

A figure stood inside.

“Come in,” said a low voice.

Jimmy stepped forward.

The door closed behind him.

Bundle waited in the car, her hands tight on the steering wheel.

She did not like waiting.

And somewhere in the dark building ahead, the name Seven Dials was about to take on a clearer shape.

A shape that might explain two deaths.

Or bring a third.

Part 9

The inside of the warehouse smelled of dust and old wood. A single lamp burned near the center of the large room. The light was weak and did not reach the corners. Jimmy paused just inside the door while his eyes adjusted.

“Come forward,” said the same low voice.

Jimmy stepped toward the light. Three men stood there. One was the man in the grey coat from earlier. The other two were strangers. All three watched him closely.

“You received our note,” said the man in the grey coat.

“I did,” said Jimmy calmly.

“You came alone?”

“Yes.”

That was not fully true, but Jimmy’s face showed no sign of it.

The man studied him for a moment, then nodded.

“Good. We do not wish to harm you, Mr. Thesiger.”

“That is kind,” said Jimmy lightly. “Considering two men are already dead.”

The air seemed to tighten.

“You speak boldly,” said one of the strangers.

“I speak plainly,” said Jimmy.

The man in the grey coat stepped closer.

“Henry Wade should not have tried to leave,” he said quietly.

Jimmy felt a chill, but he did not move.

“Leave what?” he asked.

“Leave us.”

“The Seven Dials Club?” Jimmy said.

No one answered at once. The silence itself was answer enough.

“Gerry Wade also tried to leave?” Jimmy continued.

The man’s eyes hardened.

“Gerald Wade was foolish,” he said. “He treated serious matters as a game.”

“And so you punished him?” Jimmy asked quietly.

One of the other men took a quick step forward.

“Careful,” he warned.

The man in the grey coat lifted a hand to stop him.

“We did not wish for death,” he said calmly. “But when a man knows too much and talks too freely, danger follows.”

Jimmy’s mind moved quickly.

“Knows too much about what?” he asked.

“About certain plans,” said the man.

“What plans?”

The man smiled slightly.

“You ask many questions.”

“Two men are dead,” Jimmy said again.

The smile faded.

“Listen carefully,” the man said. “Seven Dials is not a street. It is a group. Seven men. Each one holds a part of a greater design. Together they move as one.”

“And what is that design?” Jimmy pressed.

“Change,” said the man softly. “Power. Influence.”

Jimmy felt his pulse quicken.

“Political?” he asked.

“Among other things.”

There was a pause.

“Gerald Wade joined us as a joke,” the man went on. “He did not understand the weight of what he entered. Later he wished to withdraw.”

“And you would not allow that.”

“One cannot walk away from certain knowledge.”

Jimmy thought of the alarm clocks. Of the missing one.

“Did you kill him?” he asked quietly.

The man did not answer directly.

“He died because he was careless,” he said instead.

Jimmy understood the meaning.

“And Henry?” he asked.

“Henry discovered more than he should,” said the man. “He tried to warn others.”

“He tried to warn me,” said Jimmy.

The man nodded once.

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because you were close to Gerald.”

Silence filled the warehouse again.

“You are not part of this,” the man said after a moment. “Leave it. Forget the name Seven Dials. Go back to your comfortable life.”

Jimmy thought of Bundle waiting outside. Of Loraine. Of the unfinished letter.

“No,” he said quietly.

The man’s eyes grew cold.

“Then you place yourself in danger.”

Jimmy smiled slightly.

“I believe I already have.”

At that moment, outside in the street, Bundle shifted in her seat. She had seen a shadow move near the side of the warehouse. Her eyes narrowed.

She stepped quietly from the car and moved along the wall, keeping close to the building. There was a narrow side door slightly open.

She slipped inside.

From where she stood, she could hear voices.

“Seven men,” someone was saying.

Bundle leaned forward slightly, listening.

Inside, Jimmy stood firm.

“If Seven Dials is so powerful,” he said calmly, “why fear a few questions?”

The man’s face darkened.

“Because questions lead to light,” he said.

And in the shadows near the wall, unseen, Bundle understood one thing clearly.

The Seven Dials Club was not a foolish game.

It was something real.

And it was afraid.

Part 10

Bundle stayed still in the shadow near the wall. The light from the single lamp did not reach her. She could see Jimmy clearly, standing calm and straight in front of the three men.

“You speak of power,” Jimmy was saying. “Power over what?”

The man in the grey coat did not answer at once. His eyes moved slowly across Jimmy’s face.

“Power over information,” he said finally. “Over events. Over people who

believe they are free.”

Jimmy kept his voice steady.

“You mean blackmail?”

One of the other men made a sharp movement, but the leader lifted his hand again.

“You use a simple word for a complex idea,” he said.

“It is still the same thing,” said Jimmy.

The man smiled thinly.

“Suppose,” he said, “that seven men each hold a secret about seven important people. Suppose those secrets are strong enough to change votes, decisions, careers. Would that not be influence?”

Jimmy felt the meaning clearly now.

“And Gerry found out?” he asked.

“Gerald was careless,” the man repeated. “He heard things he should not have heard.”

“And you gave him chloral?” Jimmy asked quietly.

The man’s eyes flickered for just a second.

That was enough.

“You cannot prove anything,” he said calmly.

“Perhaps not,” said Jimmy. “But someone will.”

At the side door Bundle shifted her weight slightly. The wood beneath her foot made the smallest sound.

One of the strangers turned sharply.

“What was that?”

The room went still.

Jimmy’s heart jumped, but his face did not change.

The man in the grey coat moved toward the sound. Bundle stepped back deeper into the shadow, pressing herself against the wall.

The man reached the doorway and looked into the dark passage. For a moment it seemed he might see her.

But the passage was dim, and she stood perfectly still.

After a long second he turned back.

“Nothing,” he said.

The tension eased slightly.

“You have heard enough,” the leader said to Jimmy. “Now you must decide.”

“I already have,” said Jimmy.

“Then you are a fool.”

“Perhaps,” Jimmy answered calmly.

The man stepped closer.

“Listen carefully. You will leave this place. You will forget what you heard tonight. If you speak of it, you will join your friends.”

The threat hung heavy in the air.

Jimmy did not move.

“And if I refuse?” he asked.

The man’s face was hard now.

“Then we act.”

In that instant, Bundle made her choice.

She stepped out of the shadows and into the light.

“That would be unwise,” she said clearly.

All three men turned sharply.

Jimmy’s eyes widened.

“Bundle!”

The leader stared at her.

“You were told to come alone,” he said coldly.

“He did,” said Bundle. “But I am very bad at following instructions.”

One of the strangers moved toward her.

“Do not,” said the leader sharply.

He looked at Bundle carefully now.

“Lady Eileen Brent,” he said slowly. “Daughter of Lord Caterham.”

“That is correct,” said Bundle calmly.

“You should not be here.”

“And yet,” she replied, “I am.”

The man's mind worked quickly. The name Brent carried weight. Lord Caterham was known in many circles.

"You misunderstand the situation," he said more smoothly. "This is a private meeting."

"Two private meetings have ended in death," said Bundle quietly. "I think we understand very well."

Silence followed.

Outside, a distant police whistle sounded faintly.

The leader's head turned slightly.

Jimmy did not miss the movement.

"You called them?" he whispered to Bundle.

"Of course," she murmured back.

The man in the grey coat's face darkened.

"You think the police can protect you?"

"No," said Bundle honestly. "But they can ask questions."

The whistle sounded again, closer now.

The three men exchanged quick looks.

"This is not finished," the leader said quietly.

"No," said Jimmy. "It is only beginning."

The man stepped back into the shadows. One of the others moved toward a rear door.

"Stop!" Jimmy called.

But it was too late. The rear door opened and closed quickly.

By the time uniformed officers entered through the main door, the warehouse was nearly empty.

Only Jimmy and Bundle remained under the weak lamp.

Inspector Raglan pushed inside moments later.

"I thought I might find you here," he said grimly.

Jimmy gestured toward the rear door.

"You almost did."

Raglan's eyes moved to Bundle.

“Lady Eileen,” he said sharply, “you were told to stay clear of this.”

“I dislike being told to stay clear,” she replied calmly.

Raglan sighed heavily.

“Did you hear enough?” he asked Jimmy.

“Yes,” said Jimmy quietly. “Enough to know that Seven Dials is real. And that it is afraid of light.”

Raglan nodded slowly.

“Then we will give it light.”

Outside, the night air felt colder.

The game had changed.

The Seven Dials Club was no longer only a rumor.

It was a group of men with secrets.

And now, those secrets were beginning to break open.

But somewhere in the dark streets of London, three men were already moving.

Planning.

Because Seven Dials did not fall easily.

And it did not forgive.

Part 11

The police searched the warehouse carefully, but there was little to find. The lamp, a few empty boxes, and dust on the floor. No papers. No names. No proof.

Inspector Raglan stood in the center of the room with his hands behind his back.

“They were ready,” he said. “They expected trouble.”

“They expected Jimmy,” said Bundle quietly.

Raglan gave her a sharp look.

“And you,” he added.

Jimmy moved closer.

“They admitted enough,” he said. “Seven men. Each holding secrets. Using them for power.”

Raglan nodded slowly.

“We suspected something like that. But suspicion is not proof.”

“Henry Wade tried to leave,” said Bundle. “And Gerry too.”

“Yes,” said Raglan. “And both are dead.”

The three stood in silence for a moment.

“We must find the seven,” said Jimmy.

Raglan gave a short, humorless smile.

“If only it were that simple.”

Outside, police officers moved around the building, checking doors and speaking in low voices.

“The man in the grey coat,” said Jimmy. “He is one of them.”

“We know him,” said Raglan. “His name is George Lomax.”

Bundle’s eyes widened slightly.

“George Lomax?” she repeated. “He has been at Chimneys before.”

Raglan looked at her carefully.

“Yes,” he said. “He moves in many circles.”

Jimmy felt a new weight in his thoughts.

“Then Seven Dials reaches higher than we imagined.”

“It does,” said Raglan quietly.

They left the warehouse together. The street looked ordinary again, as if nothing had happened.

“What now?” asked Bundle.

Raglan adjusted his coat.

“Now we move carefully. We watch. We listen.”

Jimmy looked toward the dark end of the street.

“And we wait?”

“Yes,” said Raglan. “For them to make a mistake.”

The next morning newspapers carried a short report about a police search in Little Compton Street. There were no details.

Jimmy sat in his flat reading the paper while Bundle stood by the window.

“They will not like this,” she said.

“No,” Jimmy agreed.

“They will strike again?”

“Perhaps. Or perhaps they will hide.”

Bundle turned.

“What do you think they fear most?”

Jimmy folded the newspaper slowly.

“Exposure,” he said. “If even one of the seven speaks openly, the rest fall.”

“Then we must find the weakest,” said Bundle.

Jimmy smiled faintly.

“You think like a general.”

“I dislike losing.”

There was a knock at the door.

Jimmy opened it. Loraine Wade stood there.

She looked tired but calm.

“I heard,” she said softly. “About the warehouse.”

“Come in,” said Jimmy.

She entered and sat down quietly.

“I cannot stay away,” she said. “This concerns my brother.”

“Yes,” said Bundle gently.

Loraine looked at Jimmy.

“Gerry was not brave,” she said quietly. “But he was not wicked. If he joined them, he did not understand.”

Jimmy nodded.

“We know.”

“And Henry?” she asked.

“Henry understood more,” said Jimmy. “Too much.”

Loraine lowered her eyes.

“Then they are dangerous.”

“Yes,” said Bundle.

Loraine lifted her head.

“Tell me what I can do.”

Jimmy and Bundle exchanged a glance.

“You may already have done it,” said Jimmy slowly.

“How?”

“Gerry wrote to you. He warned you.”

Lorraine thought for a moment.

“He once mentioned a name,” she said quietly. “Not George Lomax. Another.”

Jimmy leaned forward.

“What name?”

“Sir Stanley Digby.”

Bundle straightened.

“He is well known,” she said. “A respected man.”

Jimmy felt the pattern tightening.

“Respected men often have the most to lose,” he said quietly.

The room grew still.

Seven men.

Secrets.

Power.

And now, names.

The circle was closing.

But Seven Dials would not stand quietly while it closed.

Somewhere, decisions were being made.

Because when light begins to fall on darkness, darkness fights back.

And the next move would not be small.

It would be bold.

Part 12

The name Sir Stanley Digby lay heavy in the small room. Jimmy stood very still, as if he could see the man’s face in his mind. Bundle crossed the room slowly and sat down opposite Lorraine.

“You are certain?” she asked gently.

“Yes,” said Lorraine. “Gerry spoke of him once. He said Sir Stanley was clever.

Too clever. He laughed when he said it—but not in a happy way.”

Jimmy rubbed his forehead.

“Sir Stanley is close to several powerful men,” he said. “If Seven Dials wants influence, he would be useful.”

“Or he could be one of the seven,” said Bundle.

Jimmy looked at her.

“Yes.”

Silence filled the room again.

“Inspector Raglan must know this name,” said Loraine quietly.

“We will tell him,” said Jimmy.

That afternoon they met Raglan at his office. He listened carefully while Loraine repeated what she remembered.

Raglan did not speak at once. He wrote the name down slowly.

“Sir Stanley Digby is above suspicion in many eyes,” he said at last.

“Which makes him useful,” said Bundle calmly.

Raglan gave her a long look.

“You enjoy stepping on dangerous ground, Lady Eileen.”

“Only when it leads somewhere,” she replied.

Raglan turned back to Jimmy.

“We cannot accuse a man like Sir Stanley without proof.”

“Then we find proof,” said Jimmy quietly.

Raglan nodded.

“I will arrange a dinner,” he said. “Sir Stanley will attend. Mr. Thesiger, you move in those circles. You will also attend.”

Jimmy understood at once.

“And watch,” he said.

“Yes,” said Raglan. “Watch who watches whom.”

Two nights later, the dinner took place at a large London house. The rooms were bright with light. Guests spoke politely. Silver shone on the table.

Sir Stanley Digby was a tall man with grey hair and calm eyes. He spoke smoothly and laughed at the right moments. Nothing about him seemed secret or

dark.

Jimmy watched him closely.

During dinner, Sir Stanley turned to Jimmy.

“I heard you were recently at Chimneys,” he said lightly.

“Yes,” said Jimmy.

“Unfortunate business,” said Sir Stanley. “Young Wade. Sad accident.”

His voice was steady.

“Very sad,” said Jimmy.

For a brief moment, Sir Stanley’s eyes held his.

There was something there.

Not guilt.

But awareness.

After dinner, guests moved into the drawing room. Raglan stood near the fireplace, speaking casually to several men.

Bundle had not been invited—but she had found her way inside through another guest. She stood near a window, watching quietly.

Jimmy moved across the room and paused beside Sir Stanley again.

“Strange how accidents happen,” Jimmy said softly.

“Life is full of them,” Sir Stanley replied.

“And deaths,” Jimmy added.

Sir Stanley’s smile did not fade.

“Young men sometimes play with matters they do not understand,” he said.

Jimmy felt the meaning clearly.

“And older men guide them?” he asked.

Sir Stanley’s eyes sharpened slightly.

“Careful, Mr. Thesiger,” he said quietly.

“Of what?” Jimmy asked.

“Of mistaking shadows for enemies.”

Before Jimmy could reply, another guest joined them.

Across the room, Bundle saw George Lomax enter. He paused just inside the door. His eyes moved quickly and found Sir Stanley.

The smallest nod passed between them.
Bundle felt her breath catch.
Seven men.
And two were in this room.
She moved quietly toward Raglan.
“They know each other,” she whispered.
Raglan did not turn his head.
“Yes,” he said softly. “I see it.”
“Will you act tonight?” she asked.
“No,” he replied. “Not yet.”
The evening passed without incident. Guests left one by one. Sir Stanley shook hands and smiled.
Outside, the night air felt cold again.
Jimmy joined Bundle and Raglan on the pavement.
“He is careful,” Jimmy said.
“Yes,” said Raglan. “Too careful.”
Bundle looked back at the lit windows of the house.
“Seven men,” she murmured. “We have seen two.”
“We will find the others,” said Raglan quietly.
But even as he spoke, a black car moved slowly down the street.
Inside it sat George Lomax.
And beside him, in the dark, another man whose face could not be clearly seen.
They were not smiling.
The circle was tightening.
And Seven Dials was beginning to feel the pressure.
When men who hold secrets begin to fear exposure, they do not remain still.
They move.
And the next move would come soon.

The next morning brought tension. Jimmy woke early, which was unusual for him. He lay still for a moment, thinking about the dinner. Sir Stanley's calm face stayed clear in his mind. The small nod between him and George Lomax had not been friendly in an open way. It had been careful. Measured.

That meant something.

Jimmy rose and dressed quickly. He went to meet Bundle at her hotel. She was already in the sitting room, reading a newspaper.

"There is nothing about last night," she said without looking up.

"There would not be," Jimmy replied.

She folded the paper and studied him.

"You are thinking."

"Yes."

"About Sir Stanley?"

"About the way he warned me," Jimmy said. "Not openly. But clearly."

Bundle nodded.

"He spoke as if Gerry deserved what happened."

"Yes," said Jimmy quietly.

They were interrupted by a knock. Inspector Raglan entered without ceremony. His face was serious.

"There has been another development," he said.

Jimmy felt a sudden tightening in his chest.

"Another death?" he asked.

"No," said Raglan. "Not yet."

That word hung in the air.

"But there was an attempt," Raglan continued. "On Henry Wade's papers."

Jimmy frowned.

"What papers?"

"Documents from his office," said Raglan. "Someone broke in last night. They were searching for something."

Bundle leaned forward.

"Did they find it?"

“We do not know,” said Raglan. “But they were interrupted.”

Jimmy stood up.

“Then Henry kept something.”

“Yes,” said Raglan. “Something important.”

Bundle’s eyes brightened.

“A list?” she suggested.

Raglan did not answer directly.

“We are still checking,” he said. “But if Henry collected names, then Seven Dials has reason to fear.”

Jimmy’s thoughts raced.

“If there was a list,” he said slowly, “it may not have been kept in his office.”

Raglan looked at him sharply.

“Where then?”

“Somewhere safer,” said Jimmy. “Somewhere personal.”

“His home?” asked Bundle.

“Or with someone he trusted,” Jimmy replied.

All three thought at once.

“Lorraine,” said Bundle softly.

Raglan nodded.

“We go to her at once.”

At Deane Priory, Lorraine listened calmly while they explained.

“Henry visited me three days before he died,” she said quietly.

Jimmy stepped closer.

“Did he leave anything?”

Lorraine hesitated, then nodded.

“Yes. A small envelope. He told me to keep it safe.”

Bundle felt her pulse quicken.

“Where is it?”

Lorraine led them upstairs to a small bedroom. From a drawer she removed a plain brown envelope.

She handed it to Raglan.

He opened it carefully.
Inside were several sheets of paper.
Names.
Seven names.
Jimmy leaned forward.
Sir Stanley Digby.
George Lomax.
And five others.
Each name had notes beside it. Positions. Connections. Secrets.
Bundle let out a slow breath.
“Henry was building the circle,” she said.
Raglan’s face was grim.
“And that is why he died.”
Jimmy felt a deep mix of anger and cold resolve.
“We have them now,” he said quietly.
Raglan shook his head slightly.
“We have suspicion. Not proof.”
But he folded the papers carefully.
“Still,” he added, “this changes the balance.”
Lorraine looked at the list.
“Will this stop them?” she asked softly.
Raglan met her eyes.
“It will make them desperate.”
Outside, the wind moved through the trees.
Seven names.
Seven men.
A secret circle built on power and fear.
And now, for the first time, the circle had been drawn clearly on paper.
But men who fear exposure do not wait quietly.
Somewhere in London, Sir Stanley Digby sat at his desk.
And on that same morning, a quiet message was being sent.

The message was simple.

Act now.

Because Seven Dials would not allow itself to be broken.

Not without a fight.

Part 14

Raglan did not take the list away at once. He stood by the window in Loraine's small sitting room and read the names again slowly. Jimmy and Bundle waited without speaking.

"Henry was careful," Raglan said at last. "He wrote in short notes. No long sentences. Only facts."

"Facts can be enough," said Bundle quietly.

Raglan folded the papers and put them inside his coat.

"I will make copies," he said. "But this must not leave my hands for long."

Lorraine watched him closely.

"Will they know we have it?" she asked.

"Perhaps," said Raglan. "If they broke into Henry's office and found nothing."

Jimmy looked thoughtful.

"Then they may try again," he said. "This time here."

Lorraine went pale but did not move.

"Then I will not be alone," she said calmly.

Bundle stepped toward her.

"You will come to London," she said. "For a few days."

Lorraine hesitated.

"If that helps," she said.

"It does," said Jimmy.

Later that afternoon, Raglan returned to his office. Jimmy and Bundle walked slowly through the London streets.

"They will not wait long," said Jimmy.

"No," said Bundle. "If they are wise."

“Are they wise?”

“Yes,” she said simply. “Which makes them dangerous.”

That evening, Raglan called them to his office again.

“We will move tomorrow,” he said.

“Arrests?” asked Jimmy.

Raglan shook his head.

“Not yet. We must separate them first. Break the circle.”

“How?” asked Bundle.

Raglan’s eyes were steady.

“By doubt.”

Jimmy understood at once.

“Make each of the seven believe another has spoken,” he said.

Raglan nodded.

“Fear destroys loyalty.”

The next day, quiet messages were delivered. Not threats. Not accusations.
Only small hints.

To Sir Stanley: “Your name is known.”

To George Lomax: “Henry Wade kept records.”

To others on the list: “Seven Dials is no longer hidden.”

No sender was named.

The effect was quick.

That night, Sir Stanley did not attend a planned meeting.

George Lomax sent a short note declining an invitation.

Two others left London quietly.

The circle was shaking.

Jimmy met Bundle outside Raglan’s office.

“It is working,” he said.

“For now,” she replied.

Raglan joined them.

“One of them wishes to speak,” he said.

“Who?” asked Jimmy.

“A man named Arthur Haines. He is the weakest.”

“Weak men are useful,” said Bundle.

They met Haines in a small room under police watch. He looked pale and nervous.

“I did not want this,” he said quickly. “It was supposed to be influence only. Quiet pressure. No deaths.”

“But there were deaths,” said Jimmy.

Haines swallowed.

“Sir Stanley decided,” he said softly. “He said Gerald Wade knew too much. That Henry would ruin everything.”

Raglan leaned forward.

“Did he give the orders?”

Haines nodded.

“Yes.”

“And George Lomax?”

“He carried them out.”

Silence filled the room.

Jimmy felt a deep wave of cold clarity.

The circle had cracked.

Sir Stanley Digby.

George Lomax.

The names now stood with weight behind them.

Raglan stood slowly.

“That is enough,” he said.

Arrests were made before dawn.

Sir Stanley Digby was calm when the police came.

“You misunderstand,” he said quietly.

But the papers were placed before him.

The list.

Haines’s statement.

And the pattern of events.

For the first time, his calm face showed strain.
George Lomax did not speak at all.
By morning, Seven Dials had fallen.
The secret club was no more.
Seven men who once believed they moved unseen now stood in open light.
Jimmy and Bundle stood together outside the court days later as the charges were read.
“It is finished,” said Jimmy softly.
“Yes,” said Bundle.
She looked thoughtful.
“Seven clocks,” she murmured. “Seven streets. Seven men.”
“And one missing clock,” said Jimmy.
“Thrown out the window,” she said quietly.
Jimmy understood.
Gerry had tried to throw away his part in the circle.
Henry had tried to break it.
Both had paid for it.
But in the end, the circle had broken.
Bundle turned to Jimmy.
“You see,” she said lightly, “boredom never lasts.”
Jimmy smiled.
“No,” he agreed. “It never does.”
And somewhere in the busy city, the place called Seven Dials remained only a meeting of streets.
The secret behind its name had been brought into the open.
And the ticking had stopped.

Part 15

The days after the arrests felt strange and quiet. Newspapers were full of the story. The name Seven Dials was printed in large letters. People spoke about secret

groups, about power, about hidden influence. Many were shocked. Some said they had always suspected something like this.

Jimmy read the reports with mixed feelings. The facts were there, but the feeling of it—the dark warehouse, the careful nod between Sir Stanley and George Lomax—was not on the page.

Bundle came to see him one afternoon.

“You look thoughtful,” she said.

“I am,” Jimmy replied. “It ended quickly.”

“It ended because Henry wrote those names,” said Bundle. “And because one man was afraid.”

“Haines,” said Jimmy.

“Yes. Fear broke the circle.”

Jimmy nodded slowly.

“Gerry never understood the weight of it,” he said. “He thought it was a game.”

“And then it was too late,” said Bundle quietly.

There was silence for a moment.

“Lorraine is stronger than I thought,” Jimmy said at last.

“Yes,” said Bundle. “She stood very calm in court.”

Jimmy smiled faintly.

“She always does.”

Bundle watched him with interest.

“You care about her,” she said simply.

Jimmy did not answer at once.

“Yes,” he said finally. “I do.”

Bundle nodded, satisfied.

“Then perhaps some good has come from all this.”

A few days later, Jimmy and Bundle returned to Chimneys. Lord Caterham met them in the hall.

“Well?” he asked nervously. “Has London stopped exploding?”

“Yes,” said Bundle cheerfully. “For the moment.”

Lord Caterham sighed deeply.

“I prefer quiet problems,” he said. “Broken greenhouses. Lost keys. Not secret clubs.”

“You have your quiet again,” said Jimmy.

They walked out onto the terrace. The autumn air felt cool and clean. The gardens looked peaceful.

Jimmy looked toward the window of Bundle’s bedroom.

“That is where it began for us,” he said softly.

“Yes,” said Bundle. “With seven clocks.”

“And one missing.”

She smiled.

“You still think about that.”

“Yes,” said Jimmy. “It was the first sign that something was wrong.”

Bundle leaned against the stone wall.

“Small things matter,” she said. “A missing clock. An unfinished letter. A dying word.”

Jimmy looked at her.

“Seven Dials,” he said quietly.

“Yes.”

They stood together in silence.

Inside the house, Tredwell moved calmly through the hall. The servants spoke in low voices. Life at Chimneys had returned to its usual rhythm.

But for Jimmy and Bundle, something had changed.

They had seen how power could hide behind polite faces. They had seen how fear could control men.

And they had seen how light, once turned on, could break even a strong circle.

Lorraine came to visit some weeks later. She walked with Jimmy in the garden.

“I am glad it is over,” she said softly.

“So am I,” he replied.

“Gerry would not have understood any of it,” she said with a small sad smile.

“No,” said Jimmy gently. “But he would have liked that it ended.”

Lorraine stopped and looked at him.

“Thank you,” she said quietly. “For not forgetting.”

Jimmy shook his head.

“Some things should not be forgotten.”

As the sun lowered over Chimneys, the long shadows stretched across the lawn.

The place called Seven Dials in London remained what it had always been—a meeting of seven streets.

But the name would carry a different meaning now.

A reminder that even small circles of men can hold great danger.

And that sometimes, all it takes to break them is one missing piece.

One thrown clock.

One written name.

One person who refuses to look away.

And with that, the story of Seven Dials came quietly to its end.